

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 1979

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, XF, IS, JO
SUBJECT: WEST BANK MAYORS REACT TO EGYPTIAN INITIATIVE

REF: CAIRO 19583

SUMMARY: WEST BANK PALESTINIAN LEADERS ARE STILL
GRAPPLING WITH SADAT'S MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE. ATTEMPTS
TO MAKE REJECTION UNANIMOUS HAVE FAILED. MODERATES ARE
KEEPING OPTIONS OPEN. END SUMMARY

1. FIVE WEST BANK MAYORS PARTICIPATED NOV 26 IN A CON-
FERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AT BIR ZEIT UNIVERSITY AND
TOOK THAT OPPORTUNITY TO CRITICIZE EGYPT'S CURRENT
INITIATIVE. IN ATTENDANCE WERE: NABLUS' SHAKA', RAMALLAH'S
KHALAF, AL BIRA'S TAWIL, JERICHO'S SUWAYTI, AND HALHUL'S
MULHIM.

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2. ACCORING TO THE ARABIC DAILY "AL FAJR" (LEFTIST AND
PRO-PLO), THE MAYORS' CONSENSUS WAS AS FOLLOWS:

--THE PLO WAS THE SOLE LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
PALESTINIAN PEOPLE;

--PROPOSALS TO ENLIST WEST BANKERS AND GAZANS IN NEGOTIATIONS
ARE DISGUISED ATTEMPTS TO CIRCUMVENT THE PLO;

--SADAT'S VISIT HAS HAD A NEGATIVE EFFECT OF THE ARAB AND
PALESTINIAN CAUSE;

--NO PERMANENT PEACE IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE PALESTINIANS.

3. DESPITE THE FACADE OF UNITY, THE PRINCIPALS WERE NOT
ENTIRELY IN ACCORD. ACCORDING TO ONE PARTICIPANT, THE
CONFERENCE ITSELF WAS HASTILY CONVENED AND ILL-PREPARED.
MOREOVER, A LOCAL ARAB JOURNALIST TELLS US THAT KHALAF'S
ATTEMPTS TO PUSH A HARDLINE, REJECTIONIST STAND WERE RESISTED
BY SHAKA' WHO PREFERRED TO WAIT AND SEE. (COMMENT: SHAKA',
WHO IS SET TO LEAVE ON A FUND-RAISING TRIP TO THE ARAB STATES
THROUGH JORDAN NOV 30, HAS AN IMMEDIATE REASON NOT TO BURN
HIS BRIDGES.)

4. NOTABLY ABSENT WERE THREE MAJOR MAYORS -- HEBRON'S
QAWASIMA, TULKARM'S HANOUN, AND BETHLEHEM'S FREIJ. AS
PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, HANOUN -- A SOLID PLO SUPPORTER -- HAS
HAD GOOD WORDS FOR SADAT SINCE HIS KNESSET SPEECH. FREIJ
MET SADAT IN JERUSALEM AND HAS PRAISED HIM EFFUSIVELY.
QAWASIMA, ACCORDING TO A BRITISH COLLEAGUE WHO SAW HIM NOV 24,
IS ANGERED BY KNEE-JERK REJECTION PREVALENT IN NABLUS AND
RAMALLAH. MOREOVER, QAWASIMA TOLD HIM THAT AFTER THE KNESSET
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SPEECHE URGED HIS COLLEAGUES TO FORM A DELEGATION AND MEET
WITH SADAT IN JERUSALEM. THE ARABIC DAILY "ASH'AB" ATTRIBUTES
FREIJ AND QAWASIMA WITH IDENTICAL REACTIONS TO SADAT'S
NOV 26 SPEECH: SADAT IS JUSTIFYING HIMSELF TO HIS PEOPLE,
BUT, THERE IS YET NO PROOF OF ISRAELI MODERATION.

5. ACCORDING TO HALHUL'S MAYOR MULHIM, BOTH HEBRON'S
QAWASIMI AND GAZA'S SHAWWA HAVE CONSIDERED ASKING THE MILGOV
FOR PERMISSION TO GO TO DAMASCUS AND/OR BEIRUT TO CONSULT
WITH ARAFAT BEFORE DETERMINING A POSITION ON THE EGYPTIAN
INITIATIVE. QAWASIMA HAS NOW ABANDONED THE IDEA, BUT SHAWWA
STILL INTENDS TO GO, ACCORDING TO MULHIM.

6. PART OF DIVERSITY OF THE WEST BANK'S REACTION MAY BE
EXPLAINED BY CONFLICTING SIGNALS FROM ABROAD. AN ARAB
JOURNALIST TELLS US THAT AL FATAH HAS PASSED INSTRUCTIONS
CALLING FOR BOTH EXTREME AND MODERATE REACTIONS. (COMMENT:
WE ASSUME THIS REFLECTS THE SPLIT BETWEEN FATAH MODERATES
AND "REJECTIONISTS.")

7. COMMENT: VARIED REACTION INDICATES THAT SADAT MIGHT
DO MUCH BETTER THAN THE LIST REPORTED REFTEL WHICH INCLUDES

MANY UNREPRESENTATIVES AND LARGELY DISCREDITED PALESTINIANS REPORTED
REFTEL. CERTAINLY INCLUSION OF THE LIKES OF DOUDIN AND AL JA'
ABARI MAKE IT ALL THE MORE DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR
REPUTABLE MODERATES LIKE AL MASRI AND FREIJ TO ACCEPT. (SEPTELS)
IT IS LIKELY THAT SADAT'S DISPARAGEMENT OF THE PLO
NOV 26 WILL STRENGTHEN THE HAND OF HIS CRITICS. AT THE
SAME TIME, THERE IS NO DOUBT HIS INITIATIVE OVERALL HAS
CHALLENGED WEST BANK PALESTINIANS TO THINK MORE SERIOUSLY
ABOUT WHERE THEIR INTERESTS LIE. IF ANYTHING MORE THAN A
TOKEN REPRESENTATION IS DESIRED, HOWEVER, MORE FINESSE WILL
BE NEEDED FROM THE EGYPTIANS IN RECRUITING IT.
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